



*America's Longleaf
Restoration Initiative*
**2017 Range-wide
Accomplishment Report**





Message from
Jim Guldin,
2017 Longleaf
Partnership Council
Chair

As Chair of the Longleaf Partnership Council (LPC), I am pleased to present the 2017 Range-wide Accomplishment Report, the fifth annual LPC report that summarizes the continued progress toward the goals of the Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine.

Here are the 2017 details. For planting, we report over 131,000 acres of newly planted stands of longleaf pine across the range, a six per cent decline from 2016, reflecting a trend over the past few years. This may be related to unfounded concerns based on nursery observations that the genetic integrity of the 2014 seed crop may have been compromised by loblolly pollen reaching longleaf cones, producing the hybrid Sonderegger pine. Recent genetic tests seem to discount that possibility, but the LPC will continue to monitor the situation.

For prescribed fire, we report 1.37 million acres of burning in longleaf stands in 2017, down 17% from 2016. Land managers and prescribed burn bosses recognize that appropriate conditions for prescribed burning can vary annually, depending on not only the weather, but also on the availability of fire crews. Not only did parts of the South have an unusually wet Spring, but also the big Okefenokee wildfire and the busy western wildfire season occupied the attention of the region’s burn crews. This Report captures a variety of other accomplishments in longleaf restoration that can be attributed to the gargantuan efforts of numerous dedicated longleaf enthusiasts across the range, and I applaud their hard work as we endeavor to restore this noble ecosystem.

In addition to the habitat improvements and expansion in longleaf pine ecosystems reported here, the below accomplishments of the diverse partnership that contributes to the America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI) are something that we continue to report with pride.

- The LPC revisited the recommended planting density guidelines for planted stands of longleaf pine and now emphasize that future management options and stand quality are likely to be improved with stocking density greater than 500 trees per acre.
- We were deeply involved in work with Region 8 of the USDA Forest Service (USFS) to expand the range of longleaf pine-dominated ecosystems on National Forest lands. The Region has embarked on the “Million-Acre Challenge”, an effort to add a million acres of longleaf pine stands, more than doubling their current longleaf pine acreage.
- A Local Implementation Team Summit was held in August at Berry College in Rome, Georgia, to detail strategies for expanding longleaf pine accomplishments within the Significant Geographic Areas. The group especially enjoyed a field tour of montane longleaf pine stands in the campus hills.
- We continued to refine the ‘game changers’ needed to achieve the 8-million acre longleaf goal, and a working group within the LPC is addressing opportunities to draw large private landowners, such as investment organizations and real estate trusts, into active longleaf restoration and management.
- A USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) commitment to expand funds available for longleaf restoration from \$10 million to \$15 million annually provided a huge uptick in support for future restoration efforts.

It’s been a privilege for a scientist like me to provide what I’d call ‘nerd-like’ leadership for the LPC in 2017. Thank goodness that two stalwarts from the world of conservation organizations also helped to guide the LPC Leadership Team. Troy Ettel, Longleaf Pine Director for The Nature Conservancy and our outgoing LPC Chair, continued to contribute superb insights for applied conservation science. Andrew Schock, Georgia State Director of The Conservation Fund, also brought his energy, vision, and talent to the Team as our incoming Vice Chair in 2017. I thank them both for their great service. Let me also compliment Kyle Jones, Longleaf Coordinator for the USFS, and Stephanie Hertz, Project Manager with Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute and a key longleaf coordinator for the Department of Defense (DoD). Both provided excellent service and leadership to the LPC during my tenure. Special thanks also to our recently retired NRCS Longleaf Pine advocate, Luther Jones, whose quiet advocacy on our behalf was instrumental in these accomplishments.

ALRI owes a huge debt of gratitude for the service of Clay Ware, the Longleaf Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Clay has indefatigably prepared this progress report as well as the four previous reports, and his attention to detail is exceeded only by his ability to scrape together these accomplishments. We are also grateful to those individuals in the states who reported the data that populates these accomplishments. I hate to report that Clay will soon retire to pursue admirable interests in craft beer and training sport dogs. All of us on the LPC will miss his expertise, guidance, political astuteness, and his wit!

Finally, I’d like to thank our Federal Coordinating Committee partners with the USFS, NRCS, USFWS, and DoD. The interaction with the Principals who help guide our deliberations and fund the restoration work has been astounding. Thanks also to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for exceeding, for the first time, a landmark funding commitment of \$5 million in grants to sustain so much of this work.

All of us on the LPC remain intently committed to the ALRI goal of 8-million acres of longleaf pine, and the habitat for the many species of flora and fauna that depend upon the longleaf ecosystem. I look forward to continuing this story, which is a model for conservation of the nation’s forests well into the 21st century.



Credit Ryan Bollinger

2017 Range-wide Accomplishment Report Findings

This report documents accomplishments associated with the America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI) in fiscal year 2017 (October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017), as compiled by State Coordination Teams and other involved entities across the longleaf range from southern Virginia to eastern Texas. The primary purpose of this report is to assess and summarize:

- the scale of various on-the-ground work performed within the longleaf range;
- the degree to which the priorities identified in ALRI’s strategic plan are being accomplished; and
- the challenges and required actions related to reaching the eight-million acre longleaf restoration goal identified in the Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine (Range-wide Plan).

The Longleaf Partnership Council (LPC) consists of 33 members representing State and Federal agencies, organizations, forest industry, forestry consultants, academia, and private landowners. This group collectively epitomizes the collaboration needed for the restoration of longleaf pine through ALRI.

This report will highlight the successes of the 17 Local Implementation Teams (LITs), working across the 18 Significant Geographic Areas (SGAs) identified in the Range-wide Plan, in getting “boots on the ground” to implement restoration activities, which the State Coordination Teams have both facilitated and tracked at the state level. The longleaf pine Federal Coordinating Committee’s (FCC) commitment to ALRI and the LPC continued in 2017 through critical contributions of resources from federal programs. As a result of these combined efforts, 2017 was another successful year with various on-the-ground activities to restore or improve longleaf pine forests reported on over 1.7 million acres across the range.

The 2017 Accomplishment Report follows the format of ALRI’s three-year planning document, Strategic Priorities and Actions 2016-2018, and will address short-term activities needed to reach our long-term goals. Five focal areas are identified:

1) Advance Key Outcomes

Significantly increase acres of longleaf pine ecosystems through establishing new forests as well as comprehensively identifying and converting existing mixed stands with a longleaf component to longleaf-dominant stands.

Improve and maintain existing acreage of longleaf pine ecosystems, with an emphasis on increasing the acreage of prescribed fire accomplished annually.

2) Understand the Baseline

Complete range-wide longleaf pine mapping to guide planning efforts.

3) Public Lands Strategy

Continue to expand opportunities to advance longleaf restoration on public lands.

4) Private Lands Strategy

Continue to expand opportunities to advance longleaf restoration on private lands.

5) Strengthen the Partnership

Look for opportunities to strengthen the Partnership through greater engagement of existing members and expanding the effort to bring in new partners and stakeholders that are supportive of the goals established in the Range-wide Plan.

Key Overall Findings

Broadly speaking, ALRI considers anything done to establish, maintain, or improve longleaf pine stands as restoration activities. These include tree planting, use of natural regeneration, prescribed burning, mid-story treatments, invasive species control, native understory plant establishment, overstory treatments, and land acquisition/easements. These activities were reported on 1,703,391 acres of public and private lands, representing a slight decrease over the record acreage mark established in 2016. Approximately 72% of the total accomplishments occurred within SGAs. Using the format of Strategic Priorities and Actions 2016-2018, we report the following major representative activities that took place under our previously mentioned focal areas in 2017.

Advance Key Outcomes

ALRI estimates that roughly 131,250 acres of longleaf pine were planted in 2017, a six percent decrease from 2016. This continues a concerning five-year trend of planting declines. Encouragingly, however, planted acreage on private lands increased to 111,845 acres, a two percent improvement compared to 2016. Planted acreage on public lands decreased by 35% to 19,409 acres, accounting for the entire overall decline in longleaf establishment.



Longleaf seedling planting on Sansavilla tract, credit Stacy Funderburke

Two-thirds of the overall accomplishments were conducted on public lands (1,135,000 acres), with the National Forest System (NFS), military installations, and state-owned lands being the primary contributors. Prescribed burning continued to be the primary driver in this disparity between public and private ownership, as this activity accounted for approximately 85% of the accomplishments reported on public land.

Highlight: Advancing Key Outcomes through the Sansavilla Tract

In November of 2014, The Conservation Fund (the Fund) acquired the 19,577 acre Sansavilla tract along the southern bank of the Altamaha River in southeastern Georgia. Its extensive river bottoms and uplands have been of interest to the State during its continued efforts to protect the Altamaha River corridor, but until then, the tract had been out of reach. It was recognized by many partners that this was a significant property because of the river corridor and the upland pine opportunities. Sansavilla is also an important buffer to

the Townsend Bombing Range so the U.S. Marine Corp was a significant funding partner. They too, like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the USDA Forest Service (USFS), were also excited about the opportunity to protect gopher tortoises and indigo snakes. So, while the federal agencies provided the bulk of the funding, both the private philanthropic community and the State also contributed.

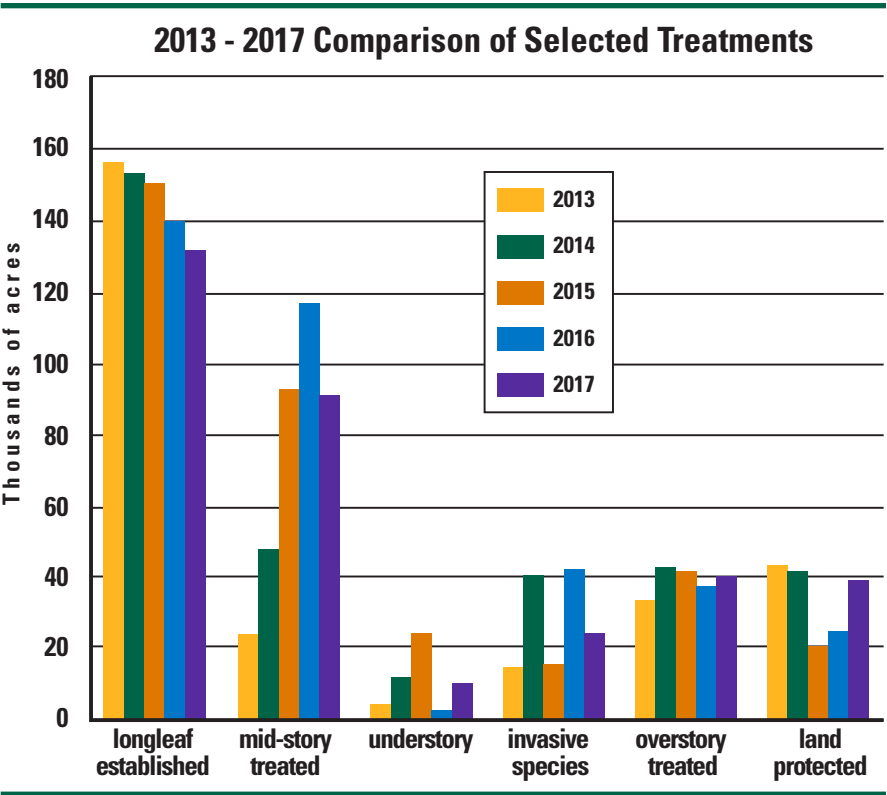
Immediately after the Fund’s purchase, the partners began developing a joint management plan, with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, to restore over 9,000 acres to longleaf pine. In some cases, restoration is by underplanting longleaf, but primarily, restoration is being achieved by

completing a final harvest on the loblolly once it is economically mature and then planting longleaf. At the time of purchase, the tract was home to about 400 gopher tortoises (a minimum viable population is 250), but with the reintroduction of fire and the resulting improvement in the habitat, it should be able to hold twice that many. Implementation of the restoration plan is with assistance from the Fort Stewart/Altamaha LIT.

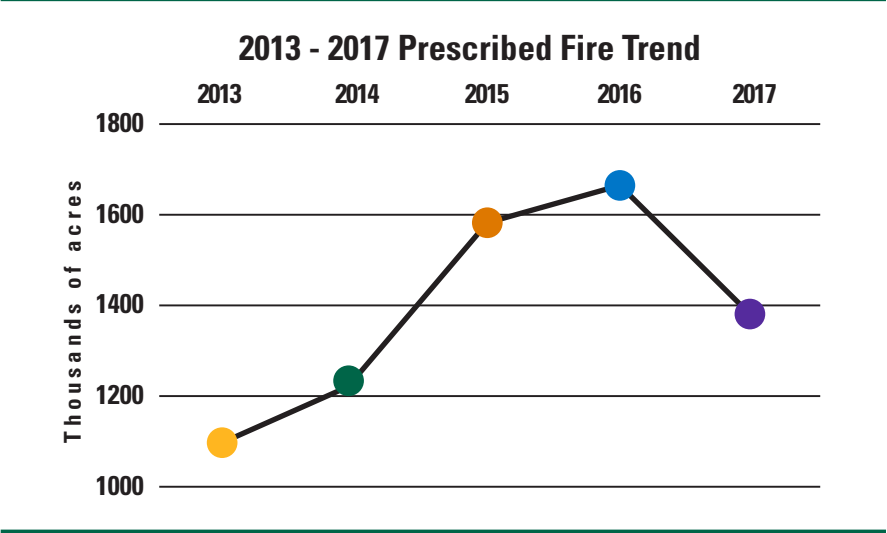
In this year’s report, we included a new reporting category to account for forests that have been converted to longleaf through silvicultural activities such as hardwood or off-site pine removal, prescribed fire, or other activities that resulted in producing a stand that meets the criteria set for longleaf forest (>50% longleaf composition). We are pleased to report that longleaf practitioners reported 5,600 acres of new longleaf stands were created in this manner. This type of acreage gain has been overlooked in the past, although we have long recognized that substantial acreage gains are being made through management of existing forests with a minor longleaf component. The need for accelerating such gains has been identified as being a major contributor toward reaching our eight-million acre goal.

Florida again reported the greatest acreage of longleaf habitat work in 2017 (as it did in 2016), with 29% of the reported accomplishments occurring in the state, followed by Alabama with 19%, Georgia with 14%, Louisiana with 11%, and North Carolina with 10%. Kudos are extended to all of the States in the longleaf range for continuing to prioritize longleaf pine restoration in their natural resource management activities.

Restoration activities were reported on 513,718 acres of private land in 2017, a nine percent decrease from 2016. Longleaf pine planting accounted for 22% of these accomplishments. An impressive 403,000 acres of prescribed burning was reported on private land in 2017, a slight decrease over the record total reported in 2016. On both public and private lands, poor fire weather was cited as a limiting factor for prescribed fire. An active wildfire season also played a role in reduced acreage burned on public lands by reducing available resources to implement prescribed burning.



A comparison of selected treatments in longleaf pine ecosystems from 2013-2017.



The five-year trend in total prescribed fire acreage in longleaf ecosystems is illustrated.



Credit Ryan Bollinger

As in 2016, 70% of total accomplishments by area were reported on public lands, which comprise only 39% of the area of existing longleaf pine. This can almost entirely be attributed to prescribed burning, which made up approximately 85% of the work done on public lands. Conversely, private lands account for 61% of the area of longleaf pine, but supported only 33% of reported accomplishments in 2017. We suspect that reporting accomplishments such as prescribed fire are more accurate on public lands than on private lands.

The need for a wider application of prescribed fire on private lands is reinforced by the difference in establishment of new longleaf pine plantations between private and public lands, with nearly 80% of new longleaf acreage planted on private lands. The LPC is very pleased with this private/public planting ratio, as it indicates that more landowners and land managers are embracing longleaf pine forest restoration and the improved wildlife habitat, risk aversion, and wood quality benefits it provides over other pine types. However, it further illustrates the need to increase prescribed burning on private lands, which only made up 26% of the total burning acreage reported in FY17.

Restoration activities on public lands—National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges, military installations, and others—are funded almost entirely through Congressional appropriations, so it’s logical to say they are supported nearly 100% by public funds.

On private lands, however, public cost-share dollars represent about half of the total overall longleaf planting cost incurred by all private landowners (including those who did not receive cost-share). Many private landowners actively manage longleaf pine stands on their own, without cost-share or other public funds in support of their management. This suggests that our accounting of the accomplishments achieved on private lands is grossly under-reported due to the difficulty in tracking activities conducted by landowners outside of cost-share programs.

2017 Accomplishment Report Summary by Ownership

Category Source- Member)	Data (Team)	Performance Measures																Acquisition/ Easements		TOTAL	
		Longleaf Establishment		Longleaf thru silviculture		Prescribed Burning		Mid-story Treatments		Native Understory Plant Establishment		NNIS Treatments		Overstory Treatments							
		Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA		
Public lands																					
National Forest System (USDA Forest Service)		4,297	3,573	4,631	4,631	405,427	342,463	12,698	11,944	33	24	2,570	1,936	14,560	10,926	1,039	1,039	440,624	371,905		
Savannah River Site (USDA Forest Service)		471	471	100	100	7,188	7,188	111	111	15	15	204	204	3,462	3,462	0	0	11,451	11,451		
National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS Service)		963	935	0	0	17,039	13,903	620	378	0	0	25	0	1,675	1,475	0	0	20,322	16,691		
Military Installations (DoD)		5,849	4,772	0	0	265,079	231,950	10,245	4,760	139	80	1,335	1,064	4,425	3,519	33,522	33,069	320,594	279,214		
National Parks/Preserves (NPS)		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
State Forests (State Foresters)		2,347	1,966	0	0	152,440	106,357	6,708	6,708	94	93	7,316	2,002	6	0	0	0	168,911	117,126		
WMAs (State WL Directors)		3,592	2,022	0	0	82,609	38,456	28,372	7,579	385	270	5,884	1	4,301	1,116	1,429	792	126,572	50,236		
Other State/Local Lands		1,890	307	453	70	35,585	4,538	6,262	1,272	139	0	1,260	260	891	136	103	30	46,130	6,543		
Public lands (through Longleaf Stewardship Fund)		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	390	390	0	0	0	0	390	390		
Total Public Lands		19,409	14,046	5,184	4,801	965,367	744,855	65,016	32,752	805	482	18,984	5,857	29,320	20,634	36,093	34,930	1,134,994	853,556		
Private Lands																					
State Forestry Agencies (State Foresters)		4,359	2,181	54	0	1,185	65	0	0	0	0	0	0	108	96	0	0	5,652	2,342		
State Wildlife Agencies (State Wildlife Directors)		0	0	0	0	2,298	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,298	0		
WHIP (NRCS)		187	57	0	0	4,892	3,890	266	261	122	122	28	28	0	0	0	0	5,495	4,358		
EQIP (NRCS)		31,326	20,727	0	0	62,616	39,744	7,933	749	6,684	3,265	3,073	1,131	1,546	1,300	0	0	113,178	66,916		
Other (NRCS)		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Total - NRCS		31,513	20,784	0	0	67,508	43,634	8,199	1,010	6,806	3,387	3,101	1,159	1,546	1,300	0	0	118,673	71,274		
Conservation Reserve Program (Farm Service Agency)		9,262	3,802	0	0	15,522	6,126	105	32	1,852	816	144	63	7,585	3,060	0	0	34,470	13,899		
Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (USFWS)		2,211	1,199	106	106	2,475	2,122	193	193	155	155	197	55	10	10	0	0	5,241	3,734		
Corporate Lands -private funds only (State Foresters) - Outside cost-share programs		1,820	1,820	0	0	3,541	2,001	110	0	0	0	0	0	100	100	0	0	5,571	3,921		
NGO Programs -private funds only (appropriate NGO) - Outside cost-share programs		628	378	30	30	16,506	13,437	295	295	19	19	20	18	335	335	2,777	2,777	20,580	17,259		
Private Landowners - private funds only (State Foresters) - Outside cost-share programs		6,545	4,584	275	75	274,988	188,261	15,696	15,316	0	0	0	0	1,120	983	0	0	298,349	209,144		
Private Landowners (through Longleaf Stewardship Fund)		828	828	51	51	18,792	6,634	1,745	598	0	0	1,451	522	68	68	0	0	22,884	8,650		
Private Landowners - Projected Acres		54,679	35,541	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	54,679	35,541		
Total Private Lands		111,845	71,117	516	262	402,815	262,280	26,343	17,444	8,832	4,377	4,913	1,817	10,872	5,952	2,777	2,777	568,397	365,764		
Grand Total - All Lands		131,254	85,163	5,700	5,063	1,368,182	1,007,135	91,359	50,196	9,637	4,859	23,897	7,674	40,192	26,586	38,870	37,707	1,703,391	1,219,320		

2017 Accomplishment Report Summary by State

Category	Performance Measures																TOTAL			
	Longleaf Establishment		Longleaf thru silviculture		Prescribed Burning		Mid-story Treatments		Native Understory Plant Establishment		NNIS Treatments		Overstory Treatments		Acquisition/ Easements					
	Reported Acres	Projected Acres	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA	Acres	Acres in SGA				
Public Lands	Texas	194	0	194	0	0	41,200	41,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	41,394	41,394	
	Louisiana	2,131	0	1,478	0	0	137,581	94,867	1,194	1,187	0	0	564	0	5,430	3,535	0	146,900	101,067	
	Mississippi	1,283	0	1,212	4,087	0	56,608	51,858	1,718	484	0	0	39	34	4,111	4,111	578	64,337	58,277	
	Alabama	2,064	0	2,064	0	0	71,919	51,818	956	956	19	10	1,609	1,538	4,095	2,948	1,039	81,701	60,373	
	Florida	7,601	0	4,708	0	0	380,122	269,266	37,961	13,039	327	97	15,698	3,471	6,036	1,759	2,072	449,817	294,222	
	Georgia	3,094	0	1,842	0	0	91,492	66,740	2,940	1,285	154	70	731	560	2,319	1,486	15,036	115,766	86,513	
	South Carolina	1,660	0	1,316	614	614	79,908	63,735	12,019	7,581	15	15	233	233	5,477	5,277	60	99,372	78,217	
	North Carolina	1,382	0	1,232	0	0	106,537	105,371	8,228	8,220	290	290	110	21	1,852	1,518	17,308	135,707	133,493	
	Virginia	0	0	0	383	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total Public Lands	19,409		14,046	5,084	4,701	965,367	744,855	65,016	32,752	805	482	18,984	5,857	29,320	20,634	36,093	34,930	1,134,994	853,556
Private Lands	Texas	548		548	106	106	955	955	11	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,514	1,514	
	Louisiana	1,044		533	126	126	24,929	8,364	3,237	942	0	0	2,745	886	136	136	0	32,091	10,861	
	Mississippi	6,054		59	0	0	13,325	1,863	6,056	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	25,439	1,922	
	Alabama	12,362		12,051	0	0	212,615	193,840	9,341	9,316	137	59	140	63	2,020	1,658	0	236,615	216,987	
	Florida	8,329		4,728	0	0	27,832	21,475	202	202	39	0	151	79	44	0	0	36,597	26,484	
	Georgia	10,946		5,181	200	0	89,567	8,522	458	0	8,222	4,029	0	0	6,929	2,874	0	116,122	20,606	
	South Carolina	8,110		5,826	54	0	7,505	4,533	184	137	171	26	1,850	766	1,028	782	0	18,848	12,070	
	North Carolina	8,955		6,650	30	30	23,470	22,728	6,854	6,836	263	263	23	23	715	502	2,777	43,057	39,779	
	Virginia	818		0	0	0	2,617	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,435	0	
	Total Private Lands	57,166		54,679	516	262	402,815	262,280	26,343	17,444	8,832	4,377	4,913	1,817	10,872	5,952	2,777	2,777	513,718	330,223
Grand Total - All lands	131,254		49,622	5,600	4,963	1,368,182	1,007,135	91,359	50,196	9,637	4,859	23,897	7,674	40,192	26,586	38,870	37,707	1,703,391	1,183,779	

Understand the Baseline: Complete Range-wide Longleaf Pine Mapping to Guide Planning Efforts

Understanding where longleaf ecosystems occur on the landscape across the range, and what relative condition they are in, is vitally important to the many partners involved in ALRI. Not only for the simple purpose of being able to tell at what rate we are gaining overall acres of longleaf, but also to identify areas where opportunities exist to restore longleaf systems. Spatially being able to see where longleaf is and where opportunities exist also helps to guide limited resources to areas that could result in valuable habitat connectivity for key species of concern. Filling in these key gaps, when given a choice, may also yield other valuable conservation results, such as making the use of prescribed fire in a given area more efficient.

The primary method to-date of “counting” longleaf acres has been through the USFS Forest Inventory and Analysis Program (FIA), and it does a good job of estimating longleaf acres across the whole range. More recently, FIA researchers have fully engaged with the LPC and are utilizing their data to help identify how many acres of restorable longleaf may exist across the range. These would include acres that have some minor component of longleaf in them but may otherwise be classified as another forest type. In other words, they are not longleaf-dominant and thus are not classified or counted as longleaf acres.



SLPCP intern Delta McDaniel collecting data assessing extent and condition of longleaf suitable sites, credit © Susan Griggs.

However, many of these minor-component longleaf stands could become longleaf-dominant stands through the application of silvicultural techniques such as selective thinning, prescribed fire, and mechanical and/or chemical forest stand improvement. It is vitally important in attaining the goals of ALRI that these acres be identified, as not all of the eight-million acre goal can be attained simply through planting new stands of longleaf. These stands also represent significant ecological opportunities, as many already contain mature longleaf trees that otherwise would take many years to occupy a given landscape.

While FIA does a good job of estimating overall acres of longleaf across the range, it is limited in detail just by the very nature of the way FIA sample plots are widely distributed across the landscape. To obtain the very local detail of longleaf mapping needed, the LPC has embarked on an ambitious new project to physically map stand-level longleaf across the range with current technology and a network of cooperators. The success of the Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) in doing just that in 2014-15 across Florida, has shown that what initially appears to be an overwhelming task, can in fact be accomplished through “windshield” surveys in the field.

The FNAI Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Geodatabase successfully mapped 2.15 million acres of longleaf ecosystems across Florida, over half of the known longleaf across the range. Utilizing grant funds from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), administered through the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, the LPC is partnering with FNAI to expand their efforts across the entire range of longleaf.

Initial work will focus on adapting the FNAI Rapid Assessment Protocols to the variety of longleaf systems across the range and re-developing the mobile data collection applications that will be used in the field, with either smartphone or tablet technology. It is important to the LPC that the right data be collected, that the methods can be repeated over time, and that other existing efforts to map longleaf can be easily incorporated, such as a very similar method already being undertaken by the Sandhills Longleaf Pine Conservation Partnership in South Carolina. This exciting Rapid Assessment will be piloted in a few of the LIT landscapes this coming year and expanded across the range as funds and on-the-ground cooperators are identified.

Public Lands Strategy

Longleaf pine sites administered by the USFS on National Forest System lands across the southern U.S. are about to receive some much-needed tender loving care, thanks in part to an ambitious plan to put an additional one million acres on the path towards restoration by 2025. The “Million-Acre Challenge” prompts the USFS Southern Region to increase the pace and scale of restoration within the longleaf pine’s historic range. Eight National Forests within the region will take part in the challenge.

“When it comes to biodiversity, few ecosystems in the continental U.S. can contend with longleaf pine,” says Ken Arney, acting regional forester for the Southern Region, “but after years of overharvesting and land-use changes, longleaf pine forests have almost totally disappeared from the landscape.”

Recognizing the need to take action to conserve and eventually replenish the longleaf pine ecosystem, the Southern Region joined with a broad coalition of businesses, nonprofits, and state and federal agencies under the banner of ALRI. The group seeks to return the acreage of longleaf pine on public and private lands to a total of eight million acres by 2025.

“We recognized fairly quickly that the initiative would have a difficult time meeting its 2025 goal, and the USFS would have to significantly increase its restoration commitment on National Forest System lands,” said Arney. “With 853,000 acres of longleaf pine-dominated forests already on National Forest System lands, we knew we had an excellent opportunity to not only increase the pace and scale of restoration on these lands, but also give a much-needed boost to longleaf-specific restoration.”



Credit USFWS/Clay Ware

Over the next several years, the Regional Office will provide technical assistance and training for personnel on National Forests taking part in the challenge. National Forests and LITs will also collaborate to identify priority longleaf activities in and around each participating National Forest. The Southern Region will provide regular updates on the region-wide efforts to stakeholders as restoration work progresses toward the 2025 deadline.

Private Lands Strategy

In 2017, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) awarded \$5.5 million through the Longleaf Stewardship Fund (LSF) to support the restoration of the longleaf ecosystem in nine states and advance the objectives of the Range-wide Plan. The 24 projects receiving grants are expected to generate more than \$7 million in matching contributions for a total conservation impact of \$12.5 million.

NFWF administers the LSF on behalf of a public-private partnership that receives federal support from the NRCS, USFS, the U.S. Department of Defense, the USFWS, and private funding from Southern Company, International Paper’s Forestland Stewards partnership, Altria Group, American Forest Foundation’s Southern Woods for At-Risk Wildlife Initiative, and Louis Bacon’s Orton Foundation, an affiliate of The Moore Charitable Foundation.

The projects are expected to establish more than 13,300 acres and improve more than 270,000 additional acres of longleaf pine habitat across the longleaf pine’s historical range. Grantees will provide educational and technical assistance related to longleaf restoration to more than 5,500 private landowners, with an anticipated 360 landowners entering into stewardship programs on private lands.

“The longleaf pine is an iconic and beloved tree throughout most of the South, and the forests these trees anchor represent some of our nation’s richest areas of biodiversity. Restoring these vital habitats at such a large scale could not be done without the cooperation and support of private landowners, federal agencies, military installations, private corporations, and a coalition of conservation organizations,” said Jeff Trandahl, executive director and CEO at NFWF.

Since 2012, the LSF has invested more than \$24.1 million in projects that will establish more than 75,600 acres, improve more than 1,050,000 additional acres of longleaf pine forest, and benefit the native species that rely on those forests.

Strengthen the Partnership

In August 2017, coordinators and representatives from all 17 LITs, LPC leadership team members, and other partners in longleaf gathered for an LIT Summit at Berry College in the mountains of North Georgia. The meeting objectives were to discuss the ALRI mission, current priorities and opportunities in longleaf pine restoration, the role of LITs in priority area mapping and goal setting toward reaching the ALRI goal, and building relationships between LIT Coordinators and the LPC leadership team. The meeting was packed with presentations, open forum discussions, and breakout sessions and was facilitated by Rob Sutter (Enduring Conservation Outcomes) and Colette DeGarady, in collaboration with LIT Consul Ryan Bollinger.

Over the course of two days, presenters and session facilitators covered a range of topics, including the LPC’s newly formed Public Lands Task Force, an upcoming USFS Leadership Summit, progress on the Longleaf Range-wide Road Map, improving collaboration with NRCS and private landowners, opportunities and strategies for accelerating restoration on public and private lands, building capacity for prescribed fire, and the future direction of LITs. Dr. Martin Cipollini also hosted a mountain longleaf walking tour on the afternoon of the Summit’s second day, highlighting the history of mountain longleaf in the region and current restoration efforts on the Berry College campus and across the Talladega-Mountain Longleaf Conservation Partnership landscape.



Dr. Cipollini discusses longleaf restoration at Berry College during LIT Summit, credit Ryan Bollinger.



12th Biennial Longleaf Conference

LONGLEAF REFLECTIONS

Looking Back Taking Stock Making Progress

Alexandria, Louisiana October 23-26, 2018

The Summit brought the LIT Coordinators and ALRI partners closer together on a personal level and gave us each a deeper understanding of how we contribute to the overall Initiative. The shared lessons learned, exchange of ideas, and action items identified at the Summit are weaving their way through the LITs at the local level and into the LPC's priority setting and implementation strategies.

An excellent upcoming opportunity to strengthen the ALRI partnership is the 2018 Biennial Longleaf Conference, which will be held October 23-26, 2018, in Alexandria, Louisiana. This location is in the Heart of Louisiana and is just east of the Kisatchie National Forest. The theme this year is "Longleaf Reflections – Looking Back, Taking Stock, Making Progress."

The conference is an opportunity for partners throughout the region to come together and learn about different aspects of longleaf restoration and conservation, visit an area with a long history of working longleaf forests, and network with others doing longleaf related work.

Conclusions

Since ALRI started reporting accomplishments in 2013, we've seen a downward trend each year in longleaf establishment. Since 2013, the acreage of new longleaf pine being planted has declined over 16%. While establishment of over 131,000 acres of longleaf pine is still impressive, the downward trend is certainly a concern, along with losses in existing longleaf acreage being reported by the USFS FIA program. One issue contributing to the decline in new longleaf acreage could be seedling availability; the LPC is actively working to address this issue by improving communications with nurseries about anticipated longleaf planting needs. We are also working with the USFS FIA program to obtain more up-to-date acreage estimates, but for this report, we are holding to our 2016 estimate of 4.7 million total acres of longleaf pine forest across the range.

Significant progress is being realized as efforts center around the following "Game Changer" activities vetted through the LPC, FCC, and Principals in 2016/2017:

- 1) Increased restoration on public lands
- 2) Increased restoration on private lands
- 3) Seek opportunities to engage large corporate landowners in longleaf restoration
- 4) Shift in the message of urgency and importance
- 5) Promote longleaf opportunities and proposals for Gulf Restoration funding
- 6) Increase support for prescribed burning
- 7) Reinvest/Expand support for land protection through fee title and easement acquisitions

Although much work remains, there is much to celebrate in the realm of ALRI. With over 1.7 million acres of on-the-ground activities reported on public and private lands, our partners continue to move forward in meeting the vision of the Range-wide Plan. The amount of longleaf acreage reported as being protected in perpetuity through fee title acquisition or easement showed a measurable increase in 2017; in fact, the number of acres reported as protected quadrupled compared to 2016. Restoration of understory also increased in 2017 compared to 2016 levels, showing that interest in native groundcover restoration remains high. Conversion of forests to longleaf through silviculture activities is the subject of a new reporting category for this year; to account for acreage gain not previously recognized. The LPC believes this activity can help us accelerate the establishment of new longleaf forests across the landscape.

Regarding public lands, the USFS has been leading the charge with its "Million-Acre Challenge" to add new acres of longleaf to National Forests; other Federal and State agencies are exploring ways to follow the USFS lead on their lands as well. NRCS also showed strong commitment to longleaf efforts by expanding funds available for future restoration efforts on private lands.

It is inspiring to reflect on the tremendous accomplishments, progress, and outcomes coming to fruition since release of the Range-wide Plan in 2009. Even more remarkable, is the renewed energy, renewed focus, and renewed excitement by all involved in ALRI. This effort is identified and has become synonymous not only with longleaf restoration, but also a landscape model for unprecedented public and private collaboration. For that reason, one cannot help but be optimistic about the future successes of ALRI.



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Publication made possible by Cooperative Agreement with the USDA Forest Service.
This institution is a an equal opportunity provider.

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